

☆ CLOSELY WATCHED BLONDES ☆

The famous fear merchant had settled down in an expansive wing chair comfy to his bulk. At this point in his career, he looked like E. T.'s grandfather. His head was pressed close to the eyepiece of a tripoded, powerful telescope that poked out from a window into the soft Laurel Canyon night.

A mile away, the bedroom was brightly lit. No curtains, torn or otherwise, blocked the view. The blinds were up. The future Lady Bountiful of Monaco was about to perform the single greatest act of charity of her charmed life.

Slowly, thoughtfully, as if returning from a night on the town, Grace Kelly disrobed. Her hat came first, then the gloves. The straps of her evening gown slipped down from white shoulders, allowing the sensuous *crêpe de Chine* to glide to the floor. There was a bra to unsnap. The last to fall were her French lace panties.

Across the shadowed canyon, "Cocky" (the obese one's nickname when he had been a schoolboy back in England) rose to the occasion.

Scopophilia—the gratification of sexual desire through gazing—is the cleanest of kinks. The scopophiliac is safe from flesh contact, germs, and from the squeeze plays that might court rejection. Linked as she was to him only by polished optical lenses across the

abyss, the lovely ice-blond ex-model from Philadelphia had consented to indulge Peeping Al's whim *just this once*. It would be over in a mere five minutes when she snapped off the lights.

Years later, when she had eluded his control and captured one of the few remaining crowns in Europe, a petulant Hitchcock was sometimes to be heard grumbling about the co-ruler of the wee land of roulette twirlers and his ex-actress wife, whom he then referred to as



▲ Grace Kelly: a class act





"Princess Disgrace."

Lose one, find one: the agreement between Alfred Hitchcock and his subsequent ice-blond leading lady, "Tippi" Hedren, put this former fashion model under bondage-contract for seven years, shackled her first name in quotes, and put the seal on the strained, obsessive relationship that produced *The Birds* and *Marnie*, two of the director's more perverse thrillers.

While shooting *The Birds*, "Tippi" agreed to the dictates of the Master of Suspense: she was to be tied down, while live birds, bound to her body, pecked at her parts. One little pecker nearly blinded the lady; she suffered a nervous collapse.

Hitchcock's misogyny, his enjoyment of brutalizing beautiful women on screen, had reached a fever pitch a few years earlier, when, in 1959, Audrey Hepburn had refused to work in *No Bail for the Judge*, a movie he had been preparing especially for her. It was to feature a graphic and nasty rape scene.

Too graphic for Audrey, who had recently emoted quite religiously in *The Nun's Story* to much acclaim. She begged off, pleading pregnancy—just as Vera Miles had two years earlier in backing out of *Vertigo*. *No Bail for the Judge* became an abandoned project—at a cool loss of two hundred grand—and in its place, Hitchcock made *Psycho*, with its rape-like shower killing. His later movies seemed to lay the blame on women for stirring uncontrollable passions in men.

Despite Hitch's chaste devotion to his wife Alma—the woman, he used to jest, who saved him from "going queer"—he developed a powerful romantic and sexual obsession for Hedren.

She was the right blonde (but at the wrong time) in the director's souring love life, and paid dearly for piquing his passions. It had been planned that during the climactic avian attack in *The Birds*, mechanical trick chirpers would be used. When they did not appear lifelike enough, the director insisted on

the use of real ones. For an entire week, "Tippi" was pelted with frenzied live crows and sea gulls. She was bound to the floor by concealed elastic bands; the nervous beaked creatures who had been attached to her dress by nylon threads were then encouraged to peck at her person. One bird did its best to claw out her left eye; the incident left a deep gash on the lower lid. The actress gave in to hysteria. She finally broke down completely, causing a full week's halt in production.

With their next film, Hitchcock became even more possessive and domineering. While *The Birds* had been shooting, he had plied Hedren with martinis during rehearsals. During the making of *Marnie*, beyond scopophilia, he was plying himself. This odd "Beauty and the Beast" courtship lasted for some time. During it, Hitch sent a peculiar gift to Melanie, Hedren's five-year-old daughter: a custom-made portrait doll of her mother, dressed and coiffed as the character she portrayed in *The Birds*—and enclosed in a small pine coffin.

Later, he took advantage of a makeup



Tippi and tormentor ▲

session (which included tests for "wounds") to order a life mask made of "Tippi," which he then kept jealously guarded in a red velvet box. One day he would send her effusive and passionate letters; the next day she would receive cool, business-like memos from him.

Although she informed him of her intention to remarry—she was going to wed her agent after completion of the film—he remained undaunted. He gushed that she was everything he'd ever dreamt about. If only Alma went to sleep and did not wake up . . .

The screenplay of *Marnie* can be seen as a symbolic exposure of the director's futile pursuit of his star: in it, a frigid kleptomaniac resists her husband's advances on their honeymoon and then attempts suicide after he rapes her.

During its filming, Hitch pursued his old lech's dream—he must have sensed that wheelchair and pacemaker were lurking in the wings for him. The movie became a senior citizen's *cri de coeur*. One day, halfway through the film, he propositioned "Tippi" in her trailer. The essence of the scene was Victorian melodrama—the villain threatened to ruin her if she would not comply. She would not. From that moment on, he refused to address her directly on the set. He would inform his assistants to "Tell that girl to . . ."

His physical and moral decline was marked after *Marnie*. Severely depressed, he inserted into *Frenzy* the most brutal and terrifying rape scene he had ever put on film.

References to bondage abound in Hitchcock's films. Yet it was on his audience that he performed the ultimate S and M exercise. He held them spellbound in darkness—through cunning, through genius, through skill. Bound to their seats, the fear master tormented them to his heart's content. And, unlike Grace and "Tippi," they kept coming back for more.

Tippi Hedren: Hitchcock's ideal ►